Study: Commonly prescribed psych medications linked to motor neuron disease

06/14/2025 // Ava Grace // **210** Views

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- A Scandinavian study suggests that even minimal use of psychiatric medications (antidepressants, anxiety drugs, sedatives) may increase the risk of motor neuron disease (MND) by up to 34 percent, raising urgent concerns given widespread prescription rates.

- Western healthcare systems heavily rely on these drugs, with 8.6 million Britons on antidepressants annually. The study questions their long-term safety, potentially linking them to a fatal neurological disorder.

- MND is a progressive, incurable disease attacking nerve cells controlling movement, leading to paralysis and death within two to five years for most patients.

- Swedish research found elevated MND risks: 34 percent for anxiolytics, 26 percent for antidepressants and 21 percent for sedatives. Antidepressant use before diagnosis also correlated with faster disease progression.

- Experts warn correlation does not equal causation, noting genetic factors (e.g., C9orf72 mutation) may influence both mental illness and MND. While vigilance is urged, untreated mental illness also carries severe risks, highlighting a complex medical dilemma.

A groundbreaking Scandinavian study has raised alarming concerns about the potential link between widely prescribed psychiatric medications – including antidepressants, anxiety drugs and sedatives – and motor neurone disease (MND), a fatal, muscle-wasting condition.

The research published in *JAMA Open Network* suggests that even minimal use of these drugs – just two prescriptions in a lifetime – could increase the risk of developing MND by up to 34 percent. With nearly nine million Britons relying on antidepressants alone, the findings demand urgent scrutiny from medical professionals and policymakers.

For decades, Western healthcare systems have increasingly turned to psychiatric medications as a first-line treatment for depression, anxiety and insomnia. The United Kingdom alone prescribes antidepressants to 8.6 million people annually, while anxiolytics and sedatives are routinely dispensed to millions more. This study, however, casts a dark shadow over the long-term safety of these drugs, suggesting they may contribute to one of the most devastating neurological disorders known to medicine. (Related: Damaged muscles in ALS patients release proteins linked to Alzheimer's, challenging the validity of diagnostic tests.)

MND is a progressive and incurable condition that attacks nerve cells controlling movement. Other names for it include amyotrophic lateral sclerosis and Lou Gehrig's disease, with the latter named after the eponymous baseball legend.

Over time, patients lose the ability to walk, speak, swallow and eventually breathe – with most patients dying within two to five years of diagnosis. The disease gained global attention through the late physicist Stephen Hawking (1942-2018), who defied the odds by surviving for decades with the illness – an extreme rarity.

The study's shocking findings

Researchers in Sweden analyzed medical records of 1,057 patients diagnosed with MND between 2015 and 2023, comparing them to a healthy control group. The results were stark, as seen below:

- **Anxiolytics (anti-anxiety drugs)**: 34 percent higher risk of MND
- **Antidepressants**: 26 percent higher risk
- **Sedatives and sleeping pills**: 21 percent higher risk

Even more troubling, patients who had taken antidepressants before diagnosis experienced a faster decline in physical function and shorter survival times. The elevated risk persisted even when medications were taken more than five years before symptoms appeared.

While the study raises serious concerns, some experts caution against jumping to conclusions. Professor Ammar Al-Chalabi of *King's College London* warns that correlation does not equal causation. Genetic factors linked to mental illness may also predispose individuals to MND, meaning the drugs themselves might not be the direct culprit.

Despite the uncertainties, lead researcher Dr. Charilaos Chourpiliadis argues that doctors should monitor younger psychiatric patients more closely for early MND symptoms. Meanwhile, neuroscientists emphasize that untreated mental illness also carries severe risks, including chronic stress and inflammation – factors that may independently contribute to neurodegeneration.

While the study does not prove that psychiatric medications cause MND, it adds to mounting evidence that mental health treatments and the conditions they address may have far-reaching neurological consequences. For millions relying on these drugs, the findings present a painful dilemma: Risk worsening mental health without treatment, or face potential long-term physical consequences.

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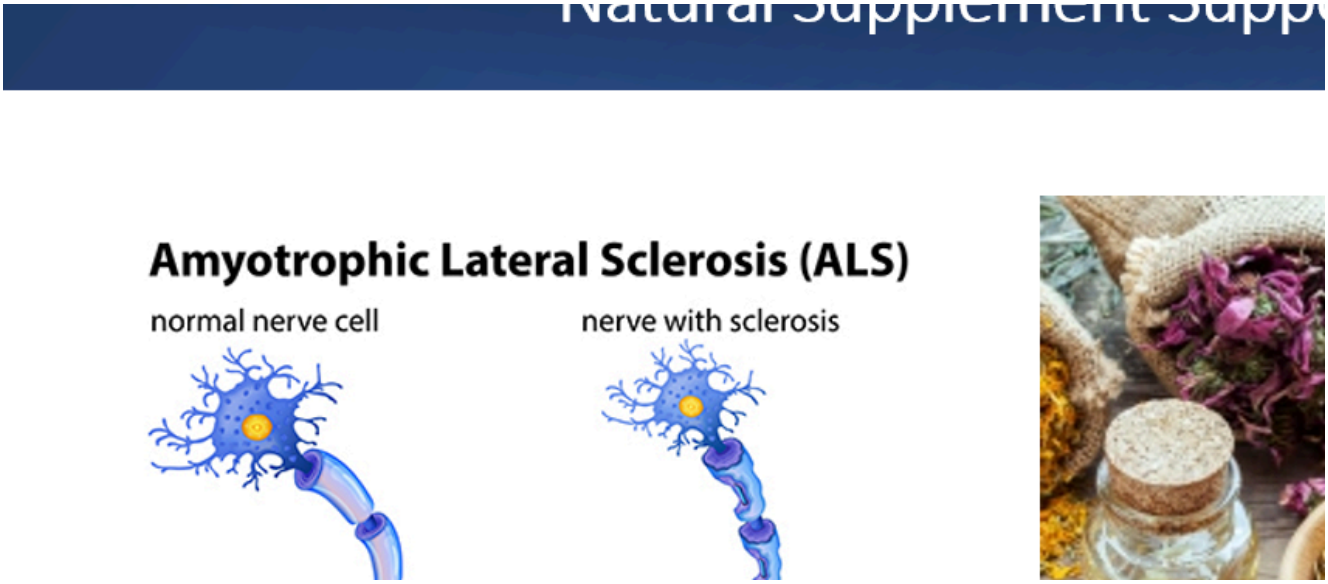

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Sources include:

DailyMail.co.uk

TheWest.com.au

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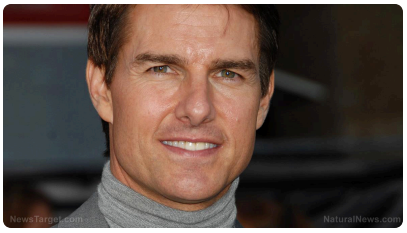

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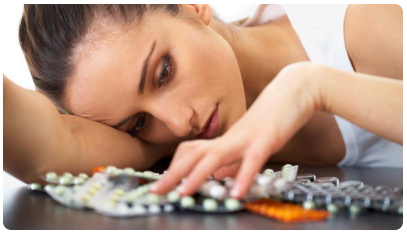

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